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ABSTRACT

When a survey of public relations practitioners showed no statistically significant correlations between prestige and 15 areas of public relations specialization, a small scale study examined the career expectations and goals of public relations students. Thirty university juniors and seniors majoring in public relations completed a questionnaire concerning their perceptions of practitioners' salaries, longevity, education, and prestige, and the subjects' preferred area of specialization. Results showed student estimates of practitioners' salaries to be rather modest, although estimates of their own salaries in 10 years were more or less realistic. Highest estimates of prestige went to the corporate field. Results suggest that students and practitioners share a general perception of which fields of public relations are the most prestigious. Perceptions of salary and interest in a field as a career choice were the most important elements in perceived prestige, although individual responses varied widely. (Tables of data from both the practitioner and the student surveys are included, along with seven footnotes.) (HTH)

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ABSTRACT

WHAT PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDENTS EXPECT -- AND THE JOBS THEY COVET

Just what do our students expect from a career in public relations? And why do they admire practitioners from agencies and corporations, but not those from public utilities? An exploratory study of 235 public relations practitioners turned up some measures of intraoccupational prestige, but no statistically significant correlations. Now a small scale study of juniors and seniors majoring in public relations has resulted in a model to explain differences in prestige between various sectors of practice, reaching an R squared of .88.

Students were also queried on career preferences and expectations for their own salary after ten years in the field. They were also asked about their personal estimates of practitioners in 15 sectors of public relations practice as to salary, experience, autonomy, and prestige.

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WHAT PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDENTS EXPECT -- AND THE JOBS THEY COVET

Just what do our students expect from a career in public relations? And why do they admire practitioners from agencies and corporations, but afford little respect to those from public utilities?

Many professions have been studied from the point of view of intraoccupational prestige; that is, which specialties in medicine are ranked highest among doctors, and which fields of practice are esteemed most highly among lawyers. What factors account for these differences in prestige? Which specialties in public relations are most prestigious among other practitioners?

These questions led to an exploratory study among 235 public relations practitioners, chosen so as to represent 15 areas of practice. (Bishop and Bosworth, 1986) In turn, this study led to some fundamental questions about the meaning of the term prestige as used heretofore by investigators, and so another study was conducted with new variables. It is this study which will be reported here. The proposed model for estimating influence reaches an R squared of .88.

At the same time, we gathered measures of student perceptions and expectations concerning public relations practice.

BACKGROUND

Social differentiation and stratification occur both among and within occupations. (Laumann, Siegel, and Hodge, 1970, 133.) Two major theories now underlie most studies of stratification: conflict theory and functional theory.

Conflict theory, stemming from Karl Marx, focuses on class strife. Marx' economic analysis was extended by Max Weber to include military, religious, political and judicial institutions. (Gerth & Mills, 1958, 49.) Weber argued that the separation of workers from the means of production is but one example of a more universal trend.

Functional theory, on the other hand, stresses that societies require both functional division of labor and a common value system. Therefore stratification is inevitable because it is functionally necessary. Functional theory includes the idea of congruence -- all important differentiated positions must have some measure of value attached in order to persuade people to forego immediate gratification for the necessary training.

Typically, this measure of value is either prestige or money. The classic definition of prestige is "a particular form of social power and advantage which is of a symbolic rather than of an economic or political character, and which gives rise to structured relationships of deference, acceptance and derogation" (Goldthorpe & Hope, 1972, 19). This definition goes beyond simple economic or social rewards to patterns of

deference, individually held. And it is some of the individual value patterns which are our primary interest. It is apparent that, for our sample, at least, the components of prestige differ widely from one sector of public relations to another. In other words, prestige is not a unitary concept.

The pioneer study in interoccupational prestige was done by Counts in 1925. (Counts, 1925, 16-27.) North and Hatt undertook the first scale study in 1947. (North & Hatt, 53.) Perhaps the first intraoccupational study was by Mason and Gross (1955, pp. 326-31), who asked school superintendents which transfers would accord them most prestige. Only income was significant.

Shortell (1974, 1-9) felt that medical specialties which made the doctor more dominant, like thoracic surgery or neurosurgery, would be accorded more prestige than specialties like podiatry and dermatology. Three groups were surveyed: physicians from three teaching hospitals in Chicago, adult patients from the same hospitals, and graduate business school students from the University of Chicago. Shortell's hypothesis was sustained, as was the hypothesis that the higher a specialty's functional autonomy, the higher its prestige.

Public Relations Officers

Bishop and Bosworth surveyed 235 public relations officers, chosen to represent 15 different sectors of practice. Each was asked to rate the "general standing or prestige" of each sector.

Within each sector, a systematic sample was selected by dividing the total number of entries in the possible sample by 30. The resulting "n" was used to select every "nth" entry for the survey. Of the 450 questionnaires mailed, 235 were returned by a predetermined cutoff date for an overall response of 52.2.

Results

Demographic characteristics: Of the 235 returns, 159 were from male practitioners, 68 from females, and 8 from persons who did not answer the question. The age distribution is shown in Table 1, with a mode of 30-35 years.

Table 1
Age of Respondents

Age	Number	Per cent	Age	Number	Per cent
18-23	5	2.2	42-47	38	16.5
24-29	28	12.1	48-53	31	13.4
30-35	42	18.2	54-59	27	11.7
			60 +	25	10.8

Non-classifiable 4
Total 235

For all practical purposes, this survey refers to white public relations practitioners. Of the 229 persons who answered this question 220 were white. Two were Oriental and 5 were

black. Almost all the respondents had a college education. Of the 231 who answered this question, 203 (87.9 per cent) received at least one college degree. Some 116 had graduate training. Only 7 (3.0 per cent) had no college training.

Parents of most of the respondents received no more than a high school education. Some 61 per cent indicated that the principal wage-earner in their family (father or mother) did not go beyond high school.

Almost 46 per cent of our sample had been in the field for less than 10 years. Only four of 216 persons have worked in public relations for more than 35 years.

Table 2
Years in Public Relations

Years	Number	Per cent	Years	Number	Per cent
0 - 4	50	23.1	20 - 24	23	10.6
5 - 9	49	22.7	25 - 29	15	6.9
10 -14	36	16.7	30 - 34	13	6.0
15 - 19	26	12.0	35 +	4	1.9
Non-classifiable	19				
Total	235				

More than 46 per cent reported a somewhat intense participation in church affairs. On the other hand, more than 30 per cent indicated a low rate of participation. Respondents tend to be slightly conservative politically. Ninety-three fell on the conservative side while 68 fell on the liberal end of the spectrum. Eight indicated no opinion. Some 67 fell between somewhat liberal and somewhat conservative.

A very discernable intraoccupational prestige hierarchy was observed, as illustrated. The prestige ranking for corporate PR is almost twice as large as that for public utilities, when converted to standard scores.. Eight sectors (corporate, sports, professional organizations, agency, media, travel and tourism, education, and non-profit associations) fell above the mean, while seven (government, religion, motion picture, retail, military, politics, and utilities) fell below.

Table 3
Intraoccupational Prestige Hierarchy for Public Relations
(On a five-point scale where 1 = very low and 5 = very high)

Institutional Sector	Mean	Institutional Sector	Mean
Corporate	3.45	Government	2.91
Sports	3.24	Religion	2.80
Organizations	3.20	Entertainment	2.78
Agency	3.19	Retail	2.77
Media	3.13	Military	2.72
Travel & Tourism	3.13	Politics	2.71
Education	3.08	Utilities	2.66
Non-profit	3.06		

We next considered the relationship between each variable and the respondents' income, as an index to success. The statistic chosen was Kendall's tau-b. because it does not assume parametric data but nevertheless indicates directionality. Results are given in Table 4.

Table 4
Correlations Between Income and Background Variables
(Utilizing Kendall's tau b) ($p<.05$)

Variable	Income
Sex	-.41
City as youth	-.05
Institutional sector	-.29
Respondent's age	.44
Education	.10
Parents' education	-.14
Experience	.42
City now working	.16
Church participation	.13
Political conservatism	.31
Parental income	.05

At this level of analysis, the stronger positive correlations are between income and age, experience, and political conservatism. Strong negative correlations exist between income and sex and institutional sector where employed.

A word may be in order here about the treatment of institutional sector. In order to meet the rules concerning the use of chi square and Kendall's tau b, it was necessary to collapse the original 15 categories into four. These were: Private Enterprise, including the original corporate, agency, retail, and professional organization groups; Government and Government-Regulated, including government, politics, military, and utilities; Entertainment, consisting of motion picture, sports, travel and tourism and media; and Altruistic Sectors, including education, religion, and non-profit organizations.

This arrangement reveals that 76 per cent of the Private Enterprise and 83 per cent of the Government subgroups have an income of more than $30,000, while only 43 per cent of the Altruistic Sector falls in that category. More than 71 per cent of respondents earning less than $30,000 fall in the Entertainment or Altruistic subgroups.

There did not seem to be any strong relationship between any of the variables and education. None of these reached the .05 level of significance. Attempts to find some significant relationship between the prestige rankings and the salary, education, or experience of the practitioners in each sector proved fruitless, however. No matter how we massaged the data, R squared never exceeded .04.

Public Relations Students

We then speculated that perhaps the fault lay in perception -- the salaries, education, experience, etc., which people believed to be attached to each sector. Shortell's study also suggests the possible importance of freedom of individual action, or autonomy, which each sector afforded.

To test these hypotheses, a short questionnaire was filled out by 30 junior and senior public relations majors at the University of Georgia. Each was asked the following questions:

1. How much money do you think the average practitioner in each of the following sectors makes each year? (Sectors were the same as in the previous study.)

2. How many years do you think the average practitioner in each sector has been in public relations?

3. How much formal education do you think the average practitioner in each sector has had?

4. How much autonomy do you think the average practitioner in each sector has within his organization?

5. What is your evaluation of the general standing or prestige of each sector within the public relations community?

6. What sector of public relations would you prefer to practice in? (Multiple answers were accepted.)

7. What do you expect your salary to be after ten years in the field?

Each question was tabulated separately so as to form a picture of student expectations and perceptions of the field. Then a least squares regression was run between the prestige rankings for each sector and the independent variables of perceived salary, education, education, autonomy, and interest in working in the field. The program used was "The Statistician," by Quant Systems. (A non-parametric regression would be more desirable, but this program was used for greater statistical power. Some Spearman's Rho tests were run on pairs of variables, and did not indicate great differences. Note that R squared values are inflated by small samples, but t values are decreased, making it more difficult to reach statistical significance.)

Results

First, we found student estimates for the average practitioner's salary to be rather modest; an average of only 2.53. If we interpolate between intervals (adding .53 of the interval distance, or .53 x $10,000, to the beginning of the interval, or $15,000), this would be only $20,300. The highest average estimate was $29,270 for corporate public relations, followed by

$28,000 for politics and $27,130 for sports. At the bottom were estimates of $6,000 for religion and $7,050 for non-profit organizations. Certainly the estimates are on the conservative side, especially considering that the average practitioner was estimated to have five and a half years of experience. And individual estimates varied widely.

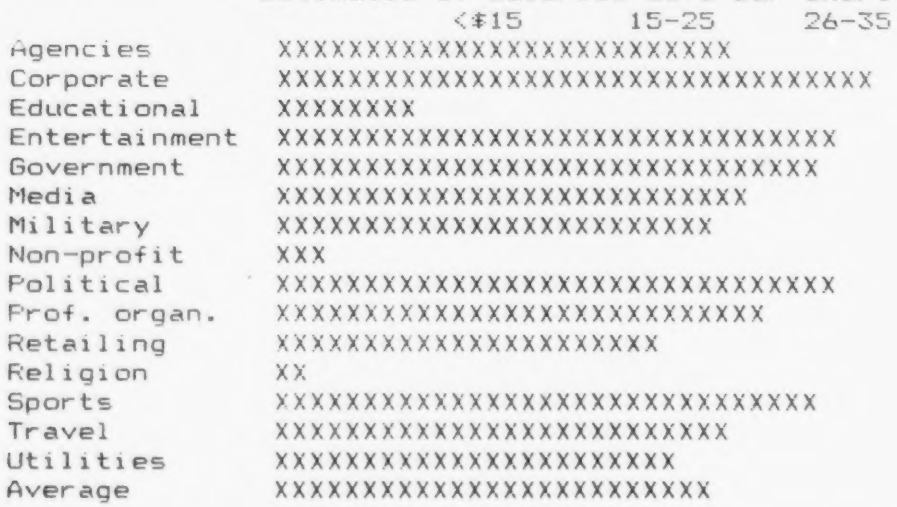
Table 5

Student Estimates of Practitioner Salaries

Agencies	2.52	($20,200)	Political	3.20	($28,000)
Corporate	3.27	($29,270)	Professional organizations	2.77	($22,700)
Educational	1.77	($11,550)	Retailing	2.17	($16,700)
Entertainment	3.13	($27,300)	Religion	1.40	($6,000)
Governmental	2.97	($24,700)	Sports	3.13	($27,130)
Media	2.70	($22,000)	Travel & tourism	2.57	($20,700)
Military	2.53	($20,300)	Utilities	2.43	($19,300)
Non-profit	1.47	($7,050)			
Average	2.53	(20,300)			

Figure 1

Estimates of Salaries as a Bar Chart



Student estimates of the average length of experience by fields also varied widely, from 8.3 years for travel & tourism and 8.1 years for government and corporate public relations to 1.6 years for non-profit organizations and 2 years for religion. They may see the non-profit, retail, or religious field as an entry point -- and indeed, many speakers make that point.

Table 6

Estimates of Practitioner Experience

Agencies	2.13 (5.6 years)	Political	2.80 (9.0 years)
Corporate	2.63 (8.1 years)	Professional organ.	2.43 (7.1 years)
Educational	1.73 (3.6 years)	Retailing	1.73 (3.6 years)
Entertainment	2.57 (7.8 years)	Religion	1.37 (2.0 years)
Governmental	2.63 (8.1 years)	Sports	2.63 (8.1 years)
Media	2.17 (5.8 years)	Travel & tourism	1.67 (8.3 years)
Military	2.20 (6.0 years)	Utilities	1.83 (4.1 years)
Non-profit	1.40 (1.6 years)		
Average	2.13 (5.6 years)		

Estimates of education are closely grouped, with political practitioners ranked highest with 3.57 and and those in religion at the bottom with 2.37. Entertainment, military, non-profit, retailing, religion, sports, travel & tourism, and public utilities fall below the bachelor's degree level. The average estimates are generally consistent with estimates of experience, however, since most of these also fall in the first category, 0 to 4 years of experience.

Table 7

Estimates of Practitioner Education

1. High School 2. Some College 3. Bachelor's 4. Graduate

Agencies	3.10	Political	3.57
Corporate	3.30	Professional organizations	3.03
Educational	3.23	Retailing	2.63
Entertainment	2.53	Religion	2.37
Governmental	3.23	Sports	2.90
Media	3.03	Travel & tourism	2.60
Military	2.50	Utilities	2.77
Non-profit	2.73		

Estimates of the autonomy enjoyed by practitioners clustered around the midpoint of a seven-point scale, averaging 4.22. Professional organizations scored the highest, with 4.63, and military the lowest with 3.60.

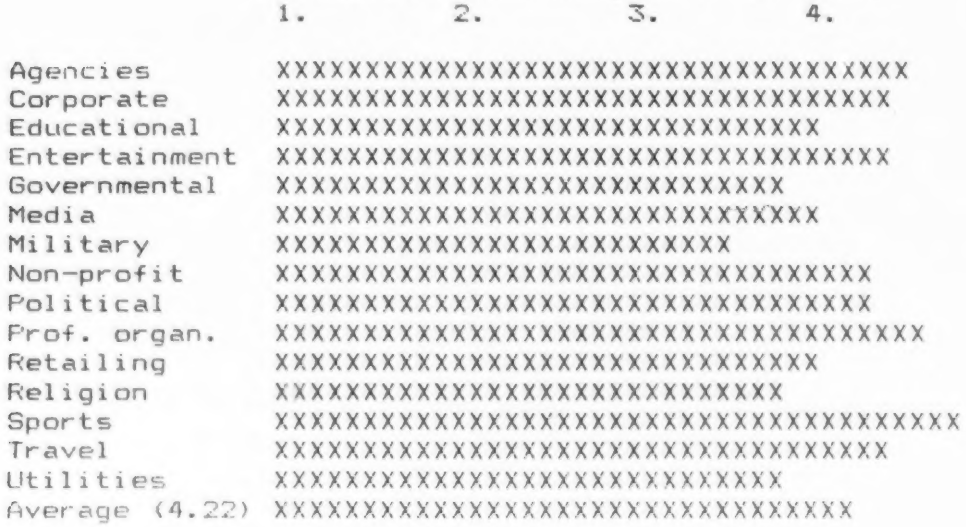
Table 8

Estimates of Practitioner Autonomy

(Seven-point scale from 1 = very little to 7 = a lot.)

Agencies	4.53	Political	4.30
Corporate	4.43	Professional organizations	4.63
Educational	4.07	Retailing	4.03
Entertainment	4.57	Religion	3.83
Governmental	3.90	Sports	4.80
Media	4.13	Travel & tourism	4.43
Military	3.60	Utilities	3.80
Non-profit	4.30		
Average:	4.22		

Figure 2
Estimates of Autonomy as a Bar Chart



Estimates of the students' own salary after ten years in the field seem more or less realistic. The average was $29,100, with a range from $36,000 for governmental public relations to $18,000 for non-profit work.

Table 9
Expected Salary by Sector of Practice
(After ten years of experience)

Agencies	3.70	($33,000)	Political	3.33	($29,330)
Corporate	3.84	($34,400)	Professional organ.	2.75	($23,500)
Education	3.00	($26,000)	Retailing	3.17	($27,700)
Entertain	3.86	($34,600)	Religion	2.80	($24,000)
Govern	4.00	($36,000)	Sports	3.44	($30,400)
Media	3.60	($32,000)	Travel & tourism	3.15	($27,500)
Military	3.00	($26,000)	Utilities	3.75	($33,500)
Nonprofit	2.33	($18,330)			
Average		3.31	($29,100)		

We allowed students to give multiple responses to the question as to where they thought they would be working in ten years, and received 103 responses for the 30 students. Heaviest choices were corporate with 19, travel & tourism with 13, and agency with 11. Military and non-profit were the least frequently chosen, followed by utilities and education.

Table 10

Student Career Choices

(Multiple responses accepted)

	Responses	%		Responses	%
Agency	11	10.7%	Politics	5	4.8
Corporate	19	18.4	Organizations	5	4.8
Education	4	3.9	Religion	5	4.8
Entertainment	7	6.8	Retailing	6	5.8
Government	6	5.8	Sports	7	6.8
Media	5	4.8	Travel	13	12.6
Military	3	2.9	Utilities	4	3.9
Non-profit	3	2.9			

Highest estimates of prestige went to the corporate field, with a 5.67, followed by agencies with a 5.30. At the bottom were non-profit and religious practitioners, with 3.27 and 3.20.

Table 11

Student Estimates of Prestige within Public Relations

(Seven-point scale from 1 = very low to 7 = very high)

Agencies	5.30	Political	4.80
Corporate	5.67	Professional organizations	4.83
Educational	3.97	Retailing	3.83
Entertainment	4.57	Religion	3.20
Governmental	4.73	Sports	4.80
Media	4.87	Travel & tourism	4.23
Military	3.80	Utilities	4.03
Non-profit	3.27		
Average	4.39		

Figure 3

Public Relations Prestige, as a Bar Chart

```
                3.        4.        5.        6.
Agencies        XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Corporate       XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Educational     XXXXXXXXXXX
Entertainment   XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Governmental    XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Media           XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Military        XXXXXXXX
Non-profit      XXX
Political       XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Prof. organ.    XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Retailing       XXXXXXXX
Religion        XX
Sports          XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Travel          XXXXXXXXXXXX
Utilities       XXXXXXXXXX
Average         XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
```

Table 12

Prestige Rankings by Students and Practitioners

Student Ranking	Practitioner Ranking
Corporate	Corporate
Agency	Sports
Media	Organization
Organization	Agency
Politics, Sports tie	Media
Government	Travel & Tourism
Entertainment	Education
Travel & Tourism	Non-profit
Utilities	Government
Education	Religion
Retailers	Entertainment
Military	Retail
Non-profit	Military
Religion	Politics
	Utilities

The average ratings from 30 students were then used for a least squares regression. (The percentage of career choices for each sector was used as an estimate of the field's popularity and chances of its choice influencing the rankings. Since this scale ranged from 0 to .18 while the other scales had a potential 7 point range, the resulting weights are greater than would otherwise have occurred.) These weights are given in Table 9.

Table 13

Coefficients with Prestige as the Dependent Variable

	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value
Constant	-.1857	1.2931	-.1447
Salary	.5619	.4637	1.2116
Experience	.0891	.5978	.1491
Education	.6896	.3104	2.2216
Autonomy	.1534	.3014	.5089
Career interest	5.6034	3.0192	1.8560

The resulting estimated coefficients were then used to predict the prestige rankings which students gave each field. Generally the errors were quite small, reaching a maximum of .54 for agencies. Results are in Table 11.

Table 14
Actual and Predicted Prestige Ranks

Sector	Actual Rating	Predicted	Difference
Agency	5.30	4.76	.54
Corporate	5.67	5.74	-.07
Education	3.91	3.98	-.07
Entertainment	4.57	4.58	-.01
Government	4.73	4.82	-.09
Media	4.87	4.47	.40
Military	3.80	3.88	-.08
Non profit	3.27	3.48	-.21
Politics	4.80	5.21	-.41
Organizations	4.83	4.53	.30
Retailing	3.83	3.84	-.01
Sports	4.80	4.88	-.08
Travel & tourism	4.23	4.50	-.27
Utilities	4.09	4.00	.09

ANOVA gave high R squared and F statistics, probably inflated by the small sample:

Table 15

ANOVA

Sources of Variation	SS	DF	MSE
Regression	6.1938	5	1.2388
Error	.8589	9	.0954
Total SS	7.0527	14	

F= 12.9811
R squared = .8782
Durbin Watson Statistic = 2.9401

Somewhat different results come from using career choice as a dependent variable. As shown in Table 15, the R squared drops to .595, and coefficients tend to be much smaller. In this sample, ease of entry (as indicated by a negative correlation between estimates of practitioner experience and career choice), is the most important factor, followed by estimates of prestige for a given sector. The coefficient for salary is the third highest, followed by a positive correlation for autonomy and a negative correlation for education. The latter may again indicate student perceptions for ease of entry.

Table 16
Coefficients Using Career Choice as Dependent Variable

ANOVA

SOURCES OF VARIATION	SS	DF	MSE
REGRESSION	.0111224	5	2.22447E-03
ERROR	7.57098E-03	9	8.41219E-04
TOTAL SS	.0186933	14	

F= 2.64434
R SQUARED= .594991
DURBIN WATSON STAT. = 2.69555

Dependent Variable -->CAREER

		COEFFICIENT	STD. ERR.	T-VALUE
CONSTANT	B 0	-.107237	.11519	-.93096
SALARY	B 1	.0268113	.0460947	.581658
EXPER	B 2	-.0677065	.0514618	-1.31567
EDUC	B 3	-.0197709	.0356638	-.554369
AUTON	B 4	.0193368	.0279739	.691246
PREST	B 5	.0493965	.0266154	1.85593

DISCUSSION

It would appear that students and practitioners share a general perception of which fields of public relations are the most prestigious. From looking at at the statistical results, one would be prone to conclude that perceptions of salary and interest in a field as a career choice are the most important elements in the equation. But an examination of individual responses indicates rather widespread differences.

Apparently all of us are swayed to some extent by how much money an individual makes, how much freedom he or she has to do the job, how exciting the job will be, and what his educational or experience qualifications are. But it would appear that each person calcuates his own formula. To some, freedom and excitement are heavy favorites. Others seem to value altruistic service, or perhaps consider themselves unsuited for the rough and tumble of the fast lane.

Finally, it is my feeling that we reinforce these prestige rankings by our own attitudes. Concretely, we are much more likely to invite corporate or agency practitioners to speak to classes and to make more of a fuss over them. It would not take a very perceptive student to guess where our own values lie!

FOOTNOTES

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